

**'Magical Realism in Riggs' *Miss Peregrine's Home For Peculiar Children*****Intan Mustika Wati**

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**Abstrak**

*Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (2011) adalah novel remaja yang menarasikan tentang kisah Jacob Portman, anak lelaki berumur enam belas tahun yang mengalami situasi realisme magis setelah kematian misterius kakeknya. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap penyajian dari realisme magis dalam narasi dan meneliti bagaimana fenomena magis disajikan dalam teks. Analisis dari studi ini didasarkan pada satu rumusan masalah utama: "Bagaimana realisme magis digambarkan dalam novel *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* oleh Ransom Riggs?". Teori yang digunakan untuk menganalisa fenomena realisme magis adalah teori lima elemen dari realisme magis oleh Wendy B. Faris. Hasil studi ini menunjukkan bagaimana dunia magis digambarkan dalam naratif tetapi masih terasa logis. Ada hal-hal supernatural dan luar biasa yang terjadi dalam teks. Fenomena ini semuanya bergabung dengan peristiwa nyata yang terjadi di dunia nyata.

**Kata Kunci:** Realisme Magis, Keanehan

**Abstract**

*Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (2011) is a young adult novel which narrates about a story of Jacob Portman, a sixteen years old boy who dealt with magical realism situations after the mysterious death of his grandfather. This study aimed to reveal the presentation of magical realism in this narrative and investigates how magical phenomenon is presented in the text. The analysis of the study is grounded on one main research question: "How is Magical Realism being portrayed in Rigg's *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*?". The theory used to analyze magical realism phenomenon is Wendy B. Faris' five elements of Magical Realism theory. The result shows how magical world displayed into the narrative yet by one or another still feels logical. There are supernatural and extraordinary things occurred in the text. These phenomenons are all intermingled to the real event that happened in the real world.

**Keywords:** Magical Realism, Peculiar

## INTRODUCTION

Magical realism is a term that defines new literary genre and technique which comes from Latin America, originally developed from post-expressionist painting in Germany on 1920 and Latin American literature on 1930 (Bowers, 2004). This category exists to describe the literary expression which embracing the works of Latin American writers. The concept originally invented by Franz Roh, a German art critic in the 1920s and 1930s. In the real world, something magical or illogic is considered as bizarre thing which is impossible to happen as people is used to the realistic life, even if sometimes the extraordinary thing may happen in everyday life, people tends to think about the possible logical explanation behind it. In Magical realism, something supernatural or fantastical can occur in the same circumstances as the mundane life. Extraordinary events happen as a part of the real life itself. The presences of magical elements really do happen and cannot be explained by human's worldly knowledge (Srikanth. 2014: 331). Magical realism erases the boundaries between magical and reality, it mingled two different elements into one category.

Many numbers of writers have published their works as magic realism started widespread globally and the development of magic realism is no longer around Latin America only. Some recognizable names on this genre come from various countries such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Colombian), Salman Rushdie (Indian born British), Haruki Murakami (Japanese), or Franz Kafka (German). These authors use magic realism to portray the real events which happening in their real life. Marquez and Rushdie in their work, *Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Midnight Children* try to portray fantastical elements which mingled with historical reality.

Another amazing work which adopts magic realism as its genre is *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*; a young adult book published in 2011 by American author, Ransom Riggs who was originally a collector of photograph whose intention is to make a picture book, but eventually decided to add narratives to the photographs. *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* tells about a boy named Jacob Portman whom experiencing magical realism events which lead him to find his true self. The blending of Magic and realism in this

story displayed by how the plot continued to describe the mundane reality but accompanied with the elements of peculiarity. This intermingles between two elements create two perspectives, a realistic and magical perspective as magic realist fiction open up concurrent two perspectives, a realistic and magical (Hegerfeldt.2005:33)

According to the background of study above, the goal of this literary analysis is to analyze how magical realism events depicted in *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* novel written by Ransom Riggs. This study is discussed using the theory of magical realism.

## THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

In accordance with statement of the problems, related theory is arranged to support the analysis. To analyze the data, the writer using theory related to the issues in Riggs' *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*. After reading the issues, Magical realism will be analyzed through the events that happened in the text. Related theory, in this case, is five elements of magical realism by Wendy B. Faris that categorizing magical realism into five elements.

### Magical Realism

The term Magical Realism refers to the concept of a very powerful artistic form that predominates creative and performing arts in Latin America which has persisted throughout history and has been the object of considerable research (Rave, 2003). This term first coined officially by German arts critic, Franz Roh in his book titled *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten Europäischen Malerei* or in english translated title "Post-Expressionism, Magical Realism: Problems of the latest European Painting" to define new style, neo-realistic art form in German painting on the late 20's century (Rave, 2003), this book was published during the peak of modernist *avant garde* movement in Europe and the beginning of German art's new tendency which are marked by a post-WWI to a rather blunt realism (Arnason 317-23).

Roh's concept of magical realism was not really defined, but he made 15 characteristics that summarized the new objectivity which can be used to identify Magical Realism in other artwork, pointing that "with the word 'magic' as opposed to

'mystic,' I wished to indicate that the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it." (Rave, 2003).

As the term started to widespread, Magical Realism has become popularly used not only limited in art mode, but also in narratives, especially amongst Latin America's literary works. Magical Realism carries varying meaning as there is no exact definition of this new literary genre, it's started to become very popular by the mid 1970s in Latin American novel (1967-1984). It becomes a mode of expression worldwide, specifically in Postcolonial cultures, replenishing realism as dominant mode in the west because it offers a way to discuss approaches of reality alternatively by many postcolonial and non western works of contemporary fictions by famous writers such as Salman Rushdie or Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Bowers, 2004). As the concept started to get forgotten in Europe, meanwhile in Latin American literature magical realism was restored with varying meaning, started in 1940 and got very popular during *boom* period, a literary movement in the mid 1970s approximately around 1967 to 1984 (Camayd-Freixas, 2014).

Many critics have attempted to identify those aspects that define this type of fiction but because of the variety of applications of these terms and their changing meanings, critics have found that it is difficult to consider them in terms of one unifying genre, but rather that they constitute particular narrative modes.

Wendy B. Faris cited in Rainer's *An Exploratory Study into Magical Realist Narrative Techniques in Contemporary Young Adult Literary Fiction* stated that

*"Magical realism combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvelous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them [the magical and the real]." (Faris, in Rainer 2009)*

The combination of realistic and fantastical narrative with the involvement of different cultural traditions means that magical realism reflects in both narrative mode and the cultural environment, the hybrid nature of post colonial society. Faris implies that magical realism narrative tether magic into reality (Rainer, 2009). Through Faris'

explanation of "the ordinary", the real world of the narrative, this magic appears as 'organically' not as spectacular event but as hybrid reality, vanishing the distinction between magic and reality so it becomes an accepted part of the ordinary (Rainer, 2009).

Faris also claimed that magical realism expands fictional reality to include events called magic in realism. She mentioned that magical realism has been universally successful because of the baseline techniques enable use of the mode across culture, she suggest that "Magical realism is characterized by five elements that form the building blocks of magical realism." In her book *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*, Faris said that there are five primary characteristics which underlying magical realism (Faris, 2004).

### 1. The Irreducible Elements

Faris, quoting David Young and Keith Hollaman said that The Irreducible elements of magic is an event occurs that are unexplainable according to the law of the universes as they have been formulated in Western empirically based discourse, that is, according to "logic, familiar knowledge, or received belief." It is often involves detailed descriptions of phenomena that are not completely affiliated into everyday reality in other narrative traditions such as mythical, religious, folkloric. The reader has difficulty in accumulating the evidence to settle questions about the status of events and characters in such fictions. Irreducible magic frequently disrupts the ordinary logic of cause and effect. In the light of disruptions of cause and effect and irreducible elements of magic described with little or no comment, in conjunction with the idea of extraordinary but actual phenomena and events, the real may seem amazing or even ridiculous. These irreducible elements are fitted well into the realistic textual environment, and barely causing any commentary by narrators or characters, who model such an acceptance for their readers. Paradoxically, though, because they also nevertheless frequently surprise those readers and their realistic expectations, they also say, in almost existential way, "I stick out." Here strong the remnants of existential agony might be detected but reduced by the more

playful side of surrealism (or the intersection of diverse cultural traditions). Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* implies the interchange of the ordinary and the extraordinary when he describes a hummingbird as "a creature which would be impossible if it did not exist." In magical realism, reality's absurdity is often emphasized because ordinary people react to magical events in recognizable and sometimes also in disturbing ways, a circumstance that normalizes the magical event but also highlighted or critiques extraordinary aspects of the real.

## 2. *The Phenomenal World*

The strong presence of the phenomenal world, distinguish it from fantasy and allegory. It appears as a realistic description, often by extensive use of detail which creates a fictional world that resembles the world we live in. Magical realist fiction includes fascinating magical details which represent a clear departure from realism, detail is untied from a traditionally imitation of life in art and literature role to a greater extent than it has been before. The irreducible details of magical realism can lead in opposite direction, and giving a hint that this may be imaginary. Magical events are usually grounded textually in a traditional realistic, even an explicitly factual manner. Faris quoting Brenda cooper argument: "the mysterious, sensuous, unknown, and unknowable are not in the subtext, as in realist writing, but rather share the fictional space with history."

## 3. *Unsettling Doubts*

The readers may hesitate in comprehending between two contradictory events and then experiencing some unsettling doubts before categorizing the irreducible elements as irreducible. The question of belief is essential, this hesitation frequently spring from the inexplicit conflict of cultural systems within the narrative, which moves toward belief in otherworldly phenomena but narrates from the post-Enlightenment perspective and in the realistic mode that traditionally exclude them. As there are numerous belief practices which differ from one and another, some readers in some cultures will hesitates less than other

relying on their beliefs and narrative traditions. In spite of that, much of magical realism is enclosed by Tzvetan Todorov's formulation of the fantastic as existing during a story when the readers hesitates between the abnormal, where an occasion is explainable according to the laws of the natural universe and the marvelous, which requires some adjustment in those laws. magical realism extends fictional reality to include events called magic in realism. Because of many variations of believes exist, however, hesitation may conceal the irreducible element. The events of magical realism may appear dreamlike, but they are reality and not dreams, the narrative may both persuade the readers to appropriate them by categorizing them as dreams and forbid that appropriation. Magical realist narratives almost seem to bring up the probability of expressing dream in order to prevent that interpretation, after having first aired it as a possibility. That strategy, while reducing the readers' doubts, also calls them into being, causing the readers to hesitate. The text often literally instructed the readers to hesitate, but even it is not, the readers still may hesitate, both in doubt because they are unsure and in wonder at their remarkable properties. However, In many particular situation, the magic in magical realism is clear and the readers barely hesitate.

## 4 *Merging Realms*

The space of uncertainty is existed in the merging of two realms or two worlds. In the term of cultural history, magical realism often merges ancient or traditional-indigenous-and modern worlds. Metaphysically, within the text, it merges the magical and the material. Generally it combines realism and the fantastic (Faris, 2004). The magical realist vision exists at the intersection of two worlds at imaginary point inside a double-sided mirror that reflecting both directions. People and words that seem ghostly inhabit these two sided mirrors, placed many times between two different realm of life and death, enlarging that space of the junction where a number of magically real fictions exist. Brian McHale, explaining what he terms as the postmodern fantastic, another world intrudes upon our world, or some representative of our world penetrates boundary of the other world.



This occasion triggers a confrontation between the laws of nature or what called as real-world norms and supernatural norms (other-worldly). The direct ways in which these different realities are presented conclude that magical realism also eliminates the boundary between fact and fiction, blurring the borders between categories. This characteristic locates magical realism within postmodernism.

#### 5 Disruption of Time, Space, and Identity

According to Faris, Magical realism disturbs accepted idea about time, space, and identity. As it they may wonder about what kind of beings they are seeing that creating so many questions of what instead of how (Rainer, 2009). People's usual sense of time is shaken throughout the story. Many Magical realism fictions characterize near-sacred or rituals enclosures, but these sacred space are not constructed so tightly because the magical narrative leak over the text and the worlds they describe (Faris, 2004). Besides disruption of time and space, magical realism also reoriented the sense of identity. The cultural hybridity and the vague nature of the narrative that identify magical realism extend to its characters, which tend toward a racial multiplicity (Faris, 2004). Besides experiencing multiple identities, Faris stated that people may be taken over by other beings or phenomena.

#### ANALYSIS

This chapter will discuss the statement of the problems as reflected in the first chapter. The theories that mentioned in the previous chapter will be used to analyze the five elements of magical realism events. Direct and indirect quotations related to the event involve in revealing and explaining the research questions.

#### Magical Realism in Miss Peregrine's Home For Peculiar Children

Magical realism that shown in the novel is classified into five elements;

#### 1. The Irreducible Elements

Magical realism in its context always connects to the condition between birth and death. In order to interpret the ritual experiences of the symbolic of death and rebirth, the societies use the narrative texts to strengthen the understanding about the worlds of the living and dying culture (Faris, 2004:137). Moreover, there is something illogically happen in our mind which is Faris (2014) called as Irreducible Element. According to Faris (2014:7), the Irreducible Element is something that cannot be explained based on the laws of the universe. It also cannot be explained based on familiar knowledge, logic and received belief in Western laws of nature, but accepted by the society (Faris, 2014:1).

*"What kind of monsters?" I'd ask, wide-eyed. It became a sort of routine. "Awful hunched-over ones with rotting skin and black eyes," he'd say. "And they walked like this!" And he'd shamle after me like an old-time movie monster until I ran away laughing.*

*Every time he described them he'd toss in some lurid new detail: they stank like putrefying trash; they were invisible except for their shadows; a pack of squirming tentacles lurked inside their mouths and could whip out in an instant and pull you into their powerful jaws. It wasn't long before I had trouble falling asleep, my hyperactive imagination transforming the hiss of tires on wet pavement into labored breathing just outside my window or shadows under the door into twisting gray-black tentacles. I was scared of the monsters but thrilled to imagine my grandfather battling them and surviving to tell the tale." (p.13)*

In this tales, Jacob's grandpa told him about a story of the horrible monsters that is very creepy. Meanwhile, according to Oxford Learners Dictionary, the word 'monster' itself refers to an imaginary living creature that is very large, ugly, and frightening. When Jacob was a child, he was

really scared of the monster in his grandpa's story, but after getting older, he begin to think that the 'monster' which his grandpa's mentioned of, is not really a monster. Here, there is a possibility of the writer would brings the readers into the irrational world of imagination that cannot be received by human's mind. How do we believe about the existence of certain horrible living creature which is unknown and never seen before. Meanwhile, this is accepted by common people since it is a story tales which is told by a mature person to a child. Somehow, in this story, Jacob thinks that his grandpa's story is not real. The monsters are not the actual monsters. It means that, the monsters can be probably human, or refer to a group of cruel people in history called Nazis (Germany) since remembering that his grandfather was the only member of his family to escape Poland before the Second World War broke out. In the real society, the invasion of Poland occurred in 1st of September to 6th October 1939. In this period of time, the bomb began to fall. This led us to think that the writer wants to mix the real phenomena which occurs in the real society becomes a part of this story. However, the other possibility comes to the consideration that the monsters are probably real monsters which really exist in the world. The monsters can be supernatural creatures since their existence are still questioning. The thing becomes abstract, as if it cannot be imagine in human mind. Here, Jacob begins to question the truth.

## 2. Phenomenal World

When the readers begin to think that the story is fantasy, the realistic elements appears. The presence of certain or several realistic things, places, times, or events in the narrative story will make the readers confuse to differ which is real and unreal phenomena. That realistic detail element is a form of phenomenal world. It is realism in magical realism that gives detail descriptions of certain event which exists in real life (Faris, 2004: 14). It also becomes the idea which brings the readers to think that the story is real.

In the *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*, the realistic phenomenon appears several times in the form of setting of place by mentioning several name of city which really exists in real life.

*"More fantastic still were his stories about life in the Welsh children's home. It was an enchanted place, he said, designed to keep kids safe from the monsters, on an island where the sun shined every day and nobody ever got sick or died. Everyone lived together in a big house that was protected by a wise old bird—or so the story went. As I got older, though, I began to have doubts."*(p.13)

The setting place which really exists in the world is the state of Welsh. By mentioning Welsh in the story, the writer seems want to make sure that the readers will consider that this story is real. Still, it is the story of the childhood of Jacob's grandpa with the other Welsh children who have supernatural power. The combination of realistic phenomena and fantasy is really interesting. How can there is an island in which nobody who lives there ever got sick or died. Again, magical realism is working here. The presence of realistic world and illogical phenomenon are built together to make sense to the readers' mind. It is creating something strange and several questions of doubting as if it is real or not. As Jacob said in the end of that quotation, the other people will also not easily believe that.

## 3. Unsettling Doubts

In unsettling doubts, the world is blurred since the combination of magic and realism creates a sense of confusion toward the readers. The condition blurs the space between reality and magical realm. It is the situation where the text presents two contradictory events of different cultures. Here, the readers' doubts will most often happen in understanding an event as a character's dream or a hallucination. The readers will confuse to differ what it is a dream or not since magic and reality are combined and triggering to believe that something is strange.

As found in this novel, the characters can do extraordinary things such like time travelers

*"I reached across her and turned to a map of Greece, even more clustered with spirals and numbers. "But what's the point of listing all these?" I said. "How would you even get to these ancient loops?"*

*"By leapfrogging," said Millard. "It's a highly complex and dangerous undertaking, but by leapfrogging from one loop to another—a day fifty years in the past, for instance—then you'll find you have access to a whole range of loops that have ceased to exist in the last fifty years. Should you have the wherewithal to travel to them, within those you'll find still other loops, and so on exponentially."*

*"That's time travel," I said, astonished. "Real time travel."*

*"I suppose so, yes."*

*"So this place," I said, pointing to Horace's ash painting on the wall.*

*"We wouldn't just have to figure out where it is, but when, too?"(p.241)*

This quotation tell us about Millard and Jacob who are doing a time loop. It can be interpreted that they jumps from time to time and from one place to another one. Millard explained to Jacob about time loop and as Jacob said in surprise "that's time travel" means that he was underlying the event and giving the readers a clear explanation in order getting confused to the story lines. Time travelling is a nonsense thing that could not be find in the real world, but this story is telling about time loop over and over again. The fact that Jacob and Millard was travelling to fifty years ago in the past cannot be achieved by normal people's mind in the real world. Therefore, it is not surprisingly if people will feel confess. This combination of realm and magical thing makes the world blurred since the time travelling can change the order of the universe.

#### 4. Merging Realms

In merging realms, magic and realist things merge naturally blur the boundary between uncanny world and reality. According to Faris (2004: 21), one of the characteristics of merging realms is that, when magical realism combines or

fuses the magical world (associated with traditional beliefs) and the real world (modern). It provides that the real and the magic can run together. It also can be marked by the ability of the character to see or to communicate with such creature which is not listed in our real life. As long as a person or character is able to see or communicate with supernatural things (ghost, angels, Gods) and regard those as an ordinary thing, it is strong maker that magical realism exists in the text.

In this novel, the fact that Jacob and his grandpa could see the monsters is a mark of merging realm phenomena.

*"He could see the monsters . The moment she said it, all the horrors I thought I'd put behind me came flooding back. They were real. They were real and they'd killed my grandfather.*

*"I can see them, too," I told her, whispering it like a secret shame. Her eyes welled and she embraced me. "I knew there was something peculiar about you," she said. "And I mean that as the highest compliment."(p.247)*

#### 5. The Disruption of Space, Time, and Identity

In magical realism, the emerging of new space and time has damaged reality. It against the norm of society and its presence disrupts human's mind and obviously against the logic. The novelty is presented by the emergence of sacred and mysterious things which make the reader confused (Faris, 2004: 23-24). One of the examples which can be seen is the emergence of ghost in the afternoon. It violates the rules in society where ghosts usually appear at night.

*"Ten peculiar children and one peculiar bird were made to fit in just three stout rowboats, with much being jettisoned and left behind on the dock. When we'd finished, Emma suggested that one of us say something—make a speech to dedicate the journey ahead—but no one seemed ready with words. And so Enoch held up Miss Peregrine's cage and she let out a*



*great screeching cry. We answered with a cry of our own, both a victory yell and a lament, for everything lost and yet to be gained.*"(p.352)

Here, in this story, Miss Peregrine could save the peculiar children from death by using loop. She turns the time into a day before the bombing happen. In everyday reality, it is impossible to change destiny, especially someone's life and death. It seems that Miss Peregrine could give a life to these children, although the condition is strange and cannot be the same. Somehow, it against the rules in the society in which someone's death could not be change. It is also a disruption of time. When the characters are travelling time, the time is over again and again turning back.

## CONCLUSION

In the previous chapter, the writer has presented the analysis of how magical realism depicted in the novel. Based on the analysis, there are several conclusions gathered in this research. Related to the findings of the research which are discussed in the previous chapter, it is concluded that the research questions are already answered. The first question is about how the magical realism presented in the novel of *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*. The researcher uses the theory of magical realism to reveal the phenomenon occurs in the storylines. Five elements of Magical Realism theory by Faris is used to analyse the data. Here, it is found that this novel contains several magical and realistic phenomena occur in the same time. Something strange are mixed with something common in real life make the story more interesting. The presence of illogical events that cannot be explained by nature as the strong mark of magical realism are also found in this novel. The presence of supernatural thing like monsters is strengthen the idea, so do the existence of peculiar children who can see the monsters (Jacob), the girl who can fly, etc can bring the reader entering the magical world of delusion which feels illogical but somehow is real. The analysis of those five elements of Faris' Magical Realism theory bring it to the conclusion that magical and extraordinary events can happened in the setting of real world and Riggs novel is classified to a magical realism literature

since it combines the fantasy world to the real world.

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